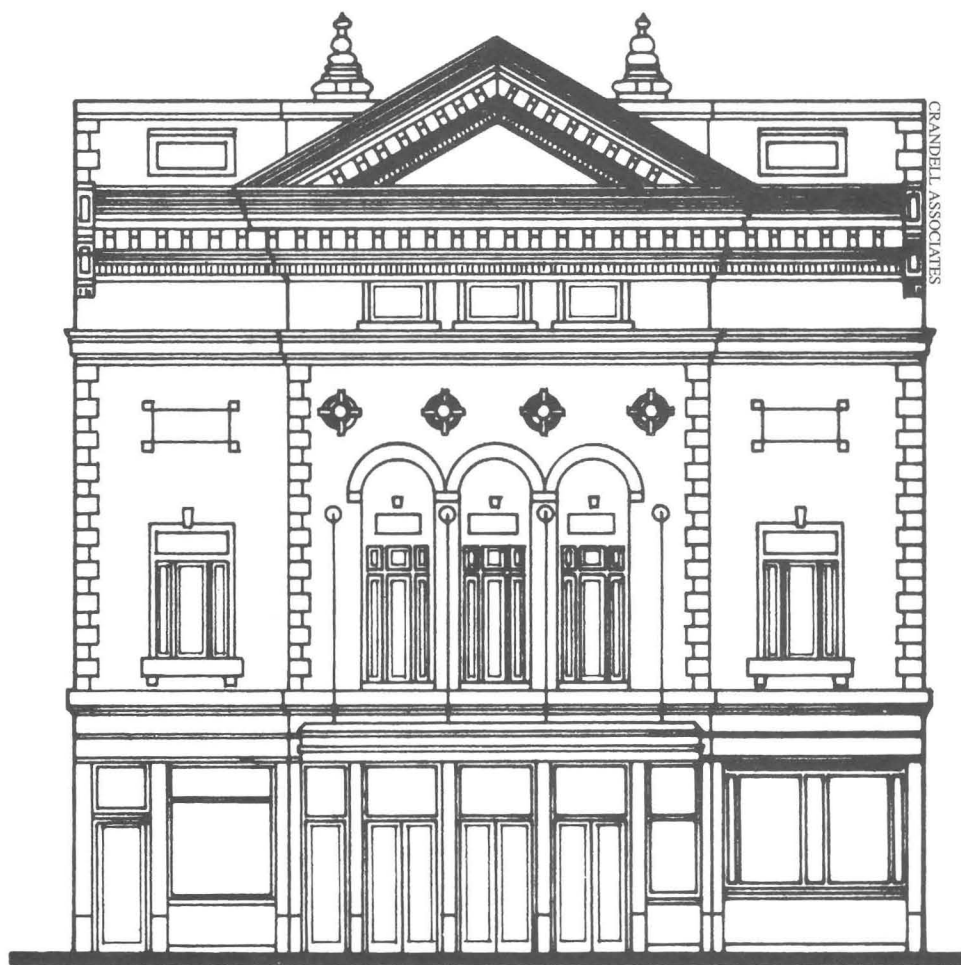


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**A History of the Paramount
Theatre - Rutland, Vermont
1914 - 2004**



A drawing of the facade of the new Paramount Theatre.

About the Author

Paul J. Crossman, Jr. is a Rutland native. He received his education at Rutland High School and the University of Vermont. He retired from General Electric Company in 1990 after 36 years service as an electrical engineer. His duties included field engineering and design and testing of complex surface weapons systems for the U.S. Navy. He is a Vermont licensed professional engineer (Electrical) and was a Vermont licensed private investigator. Paul also volunteers as an usher at the Paramount Theatre. His interests include the criminal justice system, court watching, forensic science, research, genealogy, computers, photography and traveling. He has written previous *Quarterlies* for the Rutland Historical Society entitled "Pine Hill Stone Crusher and Early Stone Crushing Practices in Vermont 1887-1932 (Volume 28 Number 2), "Development of Rocky Pond Recreational Area, Rutland, Vermont 1952-1954" (Volume 29, Number 1) and "Rutland Vermont Jails 1784-2000" (Volume 30 Number 1).

Chronology

- 1913 - The Playhouse built.
- 1914 - The Playhouse opens (January).
- 1914 - Thomas Boyle becomes manager of the Playhouse.
- 1931 - Paramount Theatre opens and later "The Movies" showing motion pictures.
- 1931 - Frank Vennett becomes new manager of the Paramount Theatre.
- 1975 - "The Movies" closes.
- 1985 - Paramount Theatre mortgaged to Paramount Center, Inc.
- 1988 - Paramount Center assumes ownership.
- 1995 - Adjoining Richardson Block Building purchased.
- 1999 - John Russell Corporation selected as construction manager; work begun in January.
- 1999 - Don Hirsch selected as executive director.
- 2000 - Restoration completed (February).
- 2000 - Opening Night for artisans and contributors (March).
- 2004 - Ron Naples becomes new executive director.

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A History of the Paramount Theatre - Rutland, Vermont 1914 - 2004

By Paul J. Crossman, Jr.

THE PLAYHOUSE

The Playhouse at 30-32 Center Street in Rutland, later to be called the Paramount Theatre, The Movies, and again the Paramount Theatre, first opened its doors to the public on 15 January 1914. This opened a 17-year era of minstrels, grand and light opera, and vaudeville.

The Playhouse was built in 1913 on the site of a livery stable. The building was constructed and owned by George T. Chaffee. The Manager was Thomas A. Boyle, well known in the theatre business, who had come to Rutland in 1903. Mr. Boyle first managed the Rutland Opera House at 65-67 Merchants Row which later became the Economy Department Store.

The Playhouse was considered one of the finest theatres in America outside the larger cities, and more artistically designed and appointed than most in the metropolitan areas. Leon H. Lempert & Son, Theatrical Architects of Rochester, New York, provided the original design for the building. The builder and contractor was F. H. Remington. Mrs. Chaffee arranged for the artistic decorations and appointments.

The Playhouse was of neo-classical revival style with brick veneer, 2 ½ stories in height, and featured entry pediment, quoins, marble, arcading keystones, pressed metal, full entablature, transom and etched glass windows. There was seating for 1000 patrons (490 in the orchestra divided by a middle aisle, 498 in the balcony, and six boxes of seven seats each). The boxes were furnished with gilt chairs, hat racks and brass railings. Color hangings and lambrequins (short ornamental drapes) were of DuBarry rose with gold decoration. The side walls were covered with DuBarry rose tapestry. The exposed stuccowork was of old ivory and gold leaf finish. A large oval shape painting on the ceiling above the orchestra section depicted music, lyric art, and drama. The lighted dome in the center of the main ceiling was finished in stucco and a border trimmed with lights.

There were 1500 softly illuminated lights in the theatre, a dimmer for effect, and an emergency use battery in the event of a power failure. A five- foot diameter electric fan at the center of the dome connected with ventilation ducts to provide air circulation. Carpeting in the boxes, aisles, auditorium, and lobby areas was of Wilton green. This material, named after Wilton, England, was woven and had a velvety surface formed by cut loops of pile.

The stage measured 40 feet deep by 54 feet wide with a gridiron positioned 65 feet above the stage to support lighting fixtures, ropes and pulleys. An arch measuring 32 feet wide by 26 feet high framed the area between the curtain and orchestra, known as the proscenium.

The theatre was totally fireproof including DuBarry rose tapestry covering the side walls which was treated with a fire-resistant agent. In a demonstration given by then Fire Chief J. C. Dunn, a gasoline torch was applied to a section of tapestry for a period of time without noticeable damage or discoloration. Automatic sprinklers and numerous exits were also provided.

There were nine dressing rooms, each accommodating three or more persons. The rooms were equipped with hot and cold water, electric lights, steam heat, marble makeup shelf and beveled glass mirrors. The chorus room with six large mirrors accommodated nine persons. The ladies rooms were finished in soft green with wicker furniture while the men's rooms were finished in yellow with mission furniture.

The theatre lobby was beautifully appointed with a black and white marble floor, a wall coating of royal antique marble, a ceiling with rose and leaf design in Old Roman gold, and several various shaped small brass chandeliers. Front windows of the lobby were art glass set in copper and red stenciled in gold. Orchestra seats and the first six rows of seats in the balcony were made of Circassian Walnut (a mottled light-brown wood of English walnut) and upholstered in Spanish leather. Other balcony seats were finished in veneer. At the rear of the balcony was an asbestos-lined booth that provided space for two motion picture projectors and a spotlight.

A brilliant opening night performance at The Playhouse on Thursday 15 January 1914 featured "The Chocolate Soldier", a comic opera by Oscar Straus based on G. B. Shaw's play "Arms and The Man." Stage Manager was Charles T. Webb. Manager of Vaudeville was R. H. Baum. Harry Levins was head usher. Orchestra Leader was Philip S. Johnson who later received national attention for his romance with the colorful New York heiress Victoria Morisini. Miss Agnes C. Parmalee, who later married Mr. Boyle, was in charge of

the Box Office. Mary E. Murphy, who later married the theatre's stage manager and projectionist, Howard Mitchell, assisted her.

The sellout show was repeated on Friday afternoon and evening to accommodate patron demand. Reserved matinee seats were priced at 50 cents, 75 cents, and one dollar. Special trains were run from Granville, New York, and Middlebury, Vermont. The opera was well presented and well received. Theatre lighting and décor were characterized as "beautiful" and "perfect". Acoustics were also impressive. Ordinary conversation on stage was audible in any part of the auditorium or balcony.

Top performers, who traveled the Rutland Railroad between Montreal and Boston, would stop to make appearances at The Playhouse. Tom Thumb, Will Rogers, Sarah Bernhardt, Ethel Barrymore and the Great Houdini were among those who delighted local audiences.

During the disastrous flood of 1927 Rutland residents who were driven from their homes in the lower part of the city were provided refuge at the theatre.

PARTIAL LIST OF SHOWS PRESENTED **AT THE PLAYHOUSE FROM 1914 TO 1931**

Aida
A Pair of Silk Stockings
American Legion Minstrels
Barney Google
Billy Markwiths Sax Sextette
Birds of Prey
Broadway Jams
Carmen, Geraldine Farrar
Cherries Are Ripe
Come Across
Concert
Dante The Great, European Magician
Faust
Fisk O'Hara
Flora Bella
Follow Me
Francis Barrett, Tenor
Geraldine Farrar
Gypsy Love
Gus Hills Minstrels
Harry Blackstone

Harry Lauder
Heink, Madame Schumann
His Bridal Night
Hitchy Koo
Hurricane with Olga Petrova
Il Travatore, Boston English Opera
John McCormack
Just Married
Katzenjammer Kids
Little Women
MacBeth
Mary's Ankle
Merchant of Venice
Merry Minstrel Shows, Neil O'Brien Minstrels
Mother's Millions
Mutt & Jeff's Dream
Mutt & Jeff in College
Mutt & Jeff in the Wolly West
Mutt & Jeff's Wedding
My Lady's Garter
Never Say Die
No. 13 Washington Square
Nothing But Lies
Oh Lady Lady
Oliver Twist
Peg O' My Heart
Petite (musical comedy)
Playthings
Quincy Adams Sawyer
Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm
Rigoletto, NY Grand Opera Company
Robert B. Mantell
Ruddigore
Russian Symphony Orchestra of New York
Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn
Rutland Theater Musicals and Melodramas
Sinners
Sweet Rosie O'Grady
Taming of the Shrew
The Belle of Broadway
The Bohemian Girl
The Bo'sn's Bride, RHS Chorus

The Brat
The Chocolate Soldier
The Death of Cleopatra
The District Leader
The Emperor Jones
The Girl in Waiting
The Great Divide
The Great Houdini, Harry Houdini
The Kiss Burglar
The Little Café
The Man On The Box
The Mikado
The Old Homestead
The Red Rose
The Road to Happiness
The Saving Grace
The Second Mrs. Tangneray, Ethel Barrymore
The Spendthrift
The Very Idea
The White Peacock with Olga Petrova
Tish
Tom Thumb and Wife Lavinia
Tommy
Uncle Seth and the Hoodoo
Uncle Tom's Cabin
Under Cover
Up in Mabel's Room
Upstairs and Down
Vanities, Earl Carroll
Very Good Eddie
When the Cat's Away
Will Rogers
Women's Law
Ziegfield Follies, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn

PARAMOUNT THEATRE/THE MOVIES (1931-1975)

When "talking pictures" came to the town the Playhouse was taken over by The Paramount. The theatre was renovated, redecorated, and made more attractive. State of the art Western Electric equipment was installed for best sound reproduction. A new marquee was constructed in the front of the building. The doors were reopened on 29 June 1931.

Presentations alternated between “talkies” and vaudeville. The movies ranged from frivolous to sentimental. The opening attraction at the new Paramount was “I Take This Woman” starring Gary Cooper and Carole Lombard. The film was based on the novel “Lost Ecstasy” by the well-known author Mary Roberts Rinehart who spent her vacations in Vermont. A four-hour Civil War epic “Gone With The Wind” (1939) and other films attracted huge audiences.

Frank A. Vennett was the Paramount’s manager and impresario. Frank had sung at the Playhouse in 1920 as a tenor in a male quartet with the Murkie-Harder Stock Company.

The onset of World War II in 1939 brought more patriotic and inspirational films to the screen. Elvis Presley, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor dominated the screen in the 1950’s

The Rutland contingent of the 43rd Infantry Division, commanded by Brig. General Leonard F. Wing, was given a farewell sendoff from the Paramount stage in the summer of 1941. Subsequent rallies to raise pledges for war bonds were also conducted from the stage. Many other activities ensued during the 1950’s and 1960’s. Several Rutland residents got their start as ushers or projectionists and later became prominent in the business and political communities.

The Rutland Herald reported on 26 June 1931: “The new Paramount is designed to supply the people of Rutland County and surroundings, a modernly equipped, high class place of entertainment, worthy of central Vermont, a spacious home where the finest things in the world of entertainment can be presented properly, where they can be enjoyed in comfort and ease.”

A storm in the 1960’s caused the roof to cave in. Workers patched the hole. The beginning of the end came shortly after the theatre name changed to “The Movies”. As with many small theatres across the country, and decline in the film industry due to the advent of television, “The Movies” closed its doors in 1975. Other motion picture theatres in the area, who also reached their demise, were the Shrine which became the Strand at 73-77 Wales Street, the Colonial at 107-109 West Street and the Grand at 112 West Street.

PARAMOUNT THEATRE - 2000 TO PRESENT

The theatre was empty and neglected for nearly 10 years until Sue Darrow formed the Center On The Alley (COTA) in 1983. The intent was to acquire the building for use as a performing arts center. COTA purchased the building from Joseph and Barbara Giancola on 12 February 1985 for a selling price of \$165,000 after the Giancolas had previously made major roof repairs. COTA then became the

Paramount Center. Using pledges and cash contributions, the mortgage was paid off on 11 February 1988. Although in a state of disrepair the theatre was structurally sound and intact with much of its decorative detailing preserved.

The Paramount Theatre was unique in that it was one of only seven Victorian opera houses remaining in the country. Over a ten-year period the Paramount Center was able to raise 3.8 million dollars in funds through local, state and federal support, and private contributions.

The Paramount Board had been maintaining the building at a cost of \$25,000 per year which included property taxes, small repair jobs, and paying a full-time staff to handle publicity, and research and grant applications. During the period 1989-1993 Saturday morning volunteer work parties performed maintenance tasks such as removing old pipes and clutter under the guidance of Bob Brunelle and Dr. Fred Bagley.

Architectural and feasibility studies were conducted in the late 1980's and early 1990's to determine feasibility of uniting the Paramount and Richardson Block buildings. The plan was to combine modern amenities with a fully restored historic theatre and for future expansion. The architectural firm of Nimtz-Berryhill-Figiel was retained to develop this plan.

In 1991 the Paramount received a financial blow. Rutland City was unable to provide a state development grant of \$200,000 on a loan payback from Domistyle Furniture Company because the business failed. A \$200,000 matching grant was also lost.

In February 1994 a Connecticut consulting firm was hired to develop a marketing plan for revitalizing the theatre. A New Hampshire firm, Roche and Company, was also hired in April 1995 to shape a comprehensive capital fund-raising campaign.

In March 1995 the Paramount purchased the Richardson Building at 36-40 Center Street from Frank Lieberman of Woodstock at a selling price of \$170,000. The building, adjacent to the Paramount, was purchased to allow larger public areas at the front lobby section of the theatre, rest room facilities, and additional office space. Restrooms were originally located in the basement. The acquisition was deemed "critical" to the success of the Paramount project.

Damian Zamias, a Pittsburgh developer, donated \$70,000 to the Paramount on 15 October 1993 as part of a financial agreement with the city to offset the impact of the planned Diamond Run Mall on the city's economy.

An estimated two million dollars was needed to restore the theatre. One of the many fund-raising efforts was the sale of naming rights to the 848 theatre seats at \$250 each. Once paid, a brass nameplate was affixed to the seat engraved with the name designated by the purchaser.

Following "tremendous" support for the Paramount by the people of Rutland, U.S. Senator from Vermont, James Jeffords, urged passage of a federal grant. In November 1997 President Clinton signed a \$1.35 million grant for Rutland City's Paramount Theatre. A few of the major contributors to the project were:

Federal Grant	\$1,350,000
State Funds	\$200,000
Damian Zamias	\$70,000
Federal Community Development Block Grant	\$325,000
Anonymous Donors	\$100,000
Sale of 650 Seats	\$162,500
Lyman Orton & Vermont Country Store	\$100,000
Housing and Conservation Board	\$71,500
Rutland City	\$70,000
Preservation Trust of Vermont	\$50,000
Central Vermont Public Service Corp	\$50,000

In January 1999 the John A. Russell Corp. was contracted to perform the restoration and construction began that spring. Extensive research was done to determine original materials, colors and fixtures. The DuBarry rose fabric covering the walls was recreated by the F. Schumacher Company of New York. Artisans began the meticulous task of repairing the damaged ornamental plaster, retouching the faded stenciled ceiling and reapplying the gold leaf to the plaster surfaces. J & R Sprinkler of Rutland installed 300 ceiling sprinklers. Larry Beaudry was the project painter. His work on the pink and white dome lined with gold leaf serves as the theatre's centerpiece. The single most costly item in the renovation budget was the construction of a new seven-story brick stage house, including the fly gallery, at a cost of approximately \$250,000. The fly gallery is a narrow platform at the side of the stage from which a stagehand works the ropes that control the lights and other equipment directly over the stage. The successful restoration of the Paramount was completed in February 2000.

The newly renovated theatre is a fully accessible state-of-the-art performing arts facility. The new lobby, now an integral part of both Paramount and Richardson Block buildings, provides for box office

space and a functional area for pre-show and intermission gatherings. All seats in the orchestra are new. Loge and balcony seats from the 1931 era were refurbished. There are removable seats in the orchestra section of the theatre to allow seating for persons with physical disabilities. A ramped passage from audience to stage enables access to those in need.

A corps of 135 volunteers serves as ushers, box office aides and in other capacities. It takes approximately 25 volunteers to put on a show.

Parking for theatre patrons is available at the Transit Center, accessed from West Street. From the Transit Center a walkway to Center Street leads to the Paramount. Free parking is available on weekends, holidays and on weekdays from 5:30 PM to 11:00 PM.

Opening night on 11 March 2000 was to honor the many highly skilled workers, artisans and contributors who worked to make the historic project possible. Over 400 people attended the gala event. The main act was The Gizmo Boys, a juggling and comedy team. The first show open to the public was 18 March 2000 featuring folk singer Arlo Guthrie and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. Tickets for that event sold out in less than 24 hours.

Executive Director of the new Paramount is Ronald Naples. He is a Manchester, Vermont, resident and former Broadway theatre manager. Naples replaced Donald Hirsch who retired in August 2004 after serving as director for five years including the renovation phase.

The theatre posted a \$100,000 loss in 2002 and a \$60,000 loss in 2003. Naples plans to increase activity at the theatre, reach out to supporters and adjust rental fees. The outlook for the new 2004-2005 season is optimistic. The number of performances will increase three-fold over the 2003-2004 season. A total of 50 new performances have already been booked.

THEATRE TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Performance Specs:

Proscenium Stage

House capacity: 848

Proscenium Height: 26 ft

Proscenium Width: 32 ft

Distance plaster line to back wall: 34 ft

Apron Depth: 4 ft

Grid Height: 53 ft 9 in

Loading Facilities

Loading Door Dimensions: 12 ft clear width, 12 ft clear height

Loading Door located stage right at stage level

Soft Goods

Grand Drape Flys and travels

Legs: 4 sets, 21 ft H x 12 ft W, Black

Borders: 4 ft 10 in H x 44 ft W, Black

Mid-range stage traveler and upstage traveler

Cyclorama is white and seamless

Other Equipment

25 ft rolling A-frame ladder

8 ft x 8 ft drum riser

60 amp shore power located off loading door

Iron and ironing board

Freight elevator located stage right to dressing rooms

Orchestra Pit is small, holds 12 musicians with stands

Dressing Rooms/Green Room

Located downstairs from stage level

No access from stage left

2 main dressing rooms, 1 "star" room

All dressing rooms have bathroom and shower facilities. Hot and cold running water

Phones located in dressing rooms are for phone card use. Phones are digital.

Electrics & Power

Power Tie-In

Stage Right

400 amp 3-phase posi-lock connectors

200 amp 3-phase cam-lock connectors

60 amp 2-phase range receptacles (Stage L & Stage R on proscenium, NEMA 14-60R)

Hanging Positions

2 F.O.H. Coves

Box Booms (House L and House R)

4 above stage electrics

6 floor pocket locations

Dimming and Control

ETC Express 48/96 Console

DMX access ports located in Booth, House L and R (orchestra level rear), Stage L and R

48 ETC Sensor dimmer modules 2.4K (96 dimmers)

Bibliography

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3. *The Stage Door - News From The Paramount Theatre*: June 2004

4. Paramount Theatre Website:

<http://www.paramountvt.org/history.html>

5. Rutland Herald Archives Website:

<http://www.rutlandherald.com/paramount/archives.htm>

6. Documents from Paramount Theatre archives

7. Documents from Nimtz-Berryhill-Figiel, Architects

8. Interview with John Berryhill, Architect.

9. Interview with Ron Naples, Paramount Executive Director.

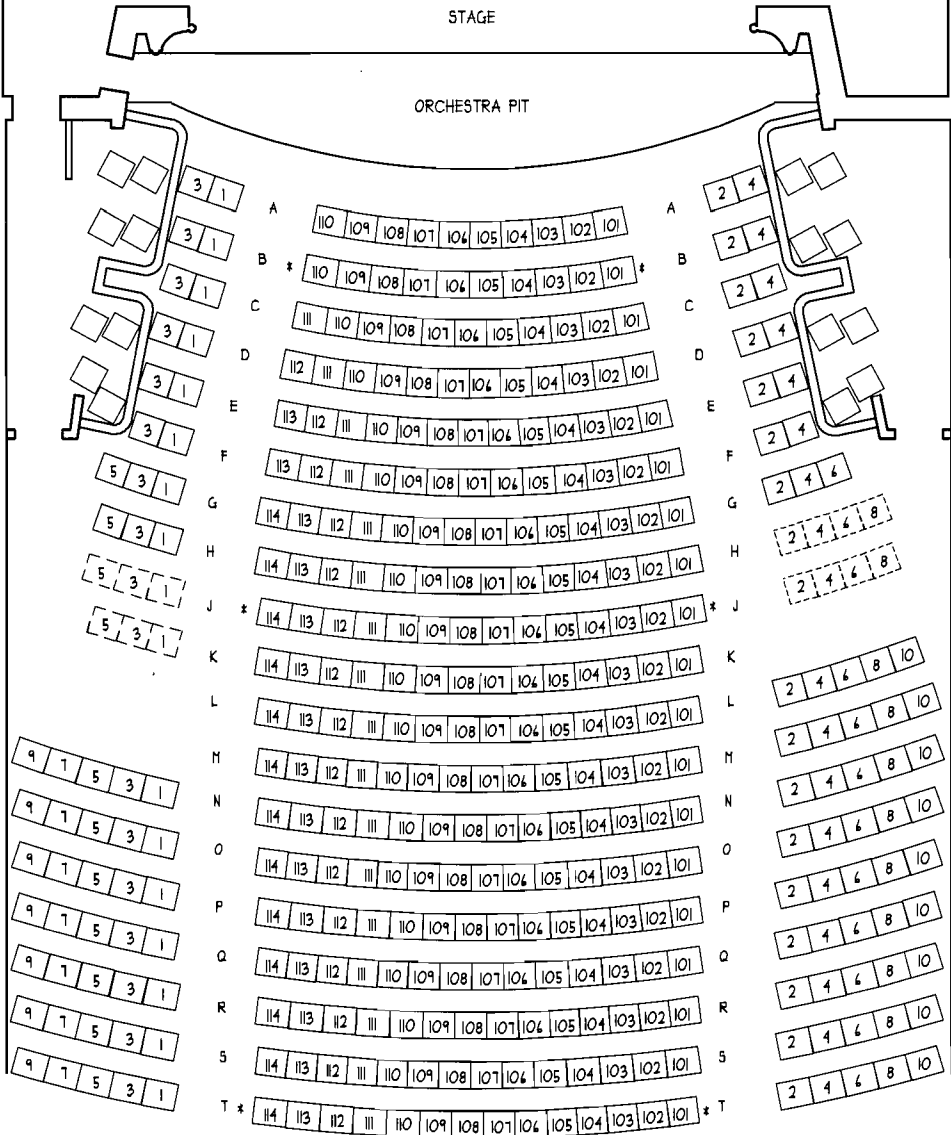
10. Interview with Bonnie Cohen, Paramount Box Office Manager & Volunteer Coordinator.

11. Rutland Historical Society file photos.

The Paramount Theatre is located at 30 Center Street,
Rutland VT 05701. The telephone number is (802) 775-0570.

Theatre

PARAMOUNT THEATRE



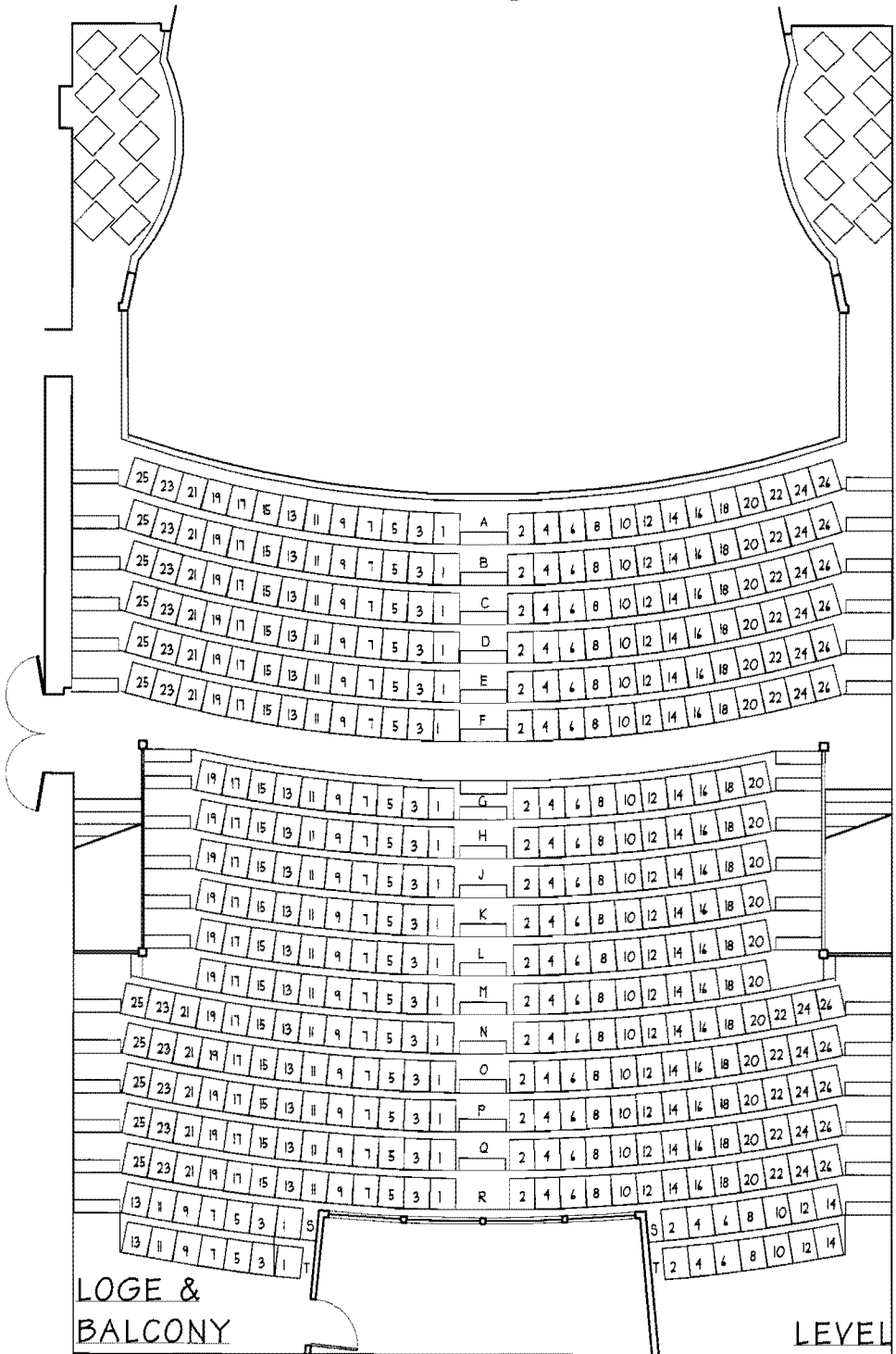
ORCHESTRA

* - ADA ACCESS
[] - REMOVABLE CHAIRS

LEVEL

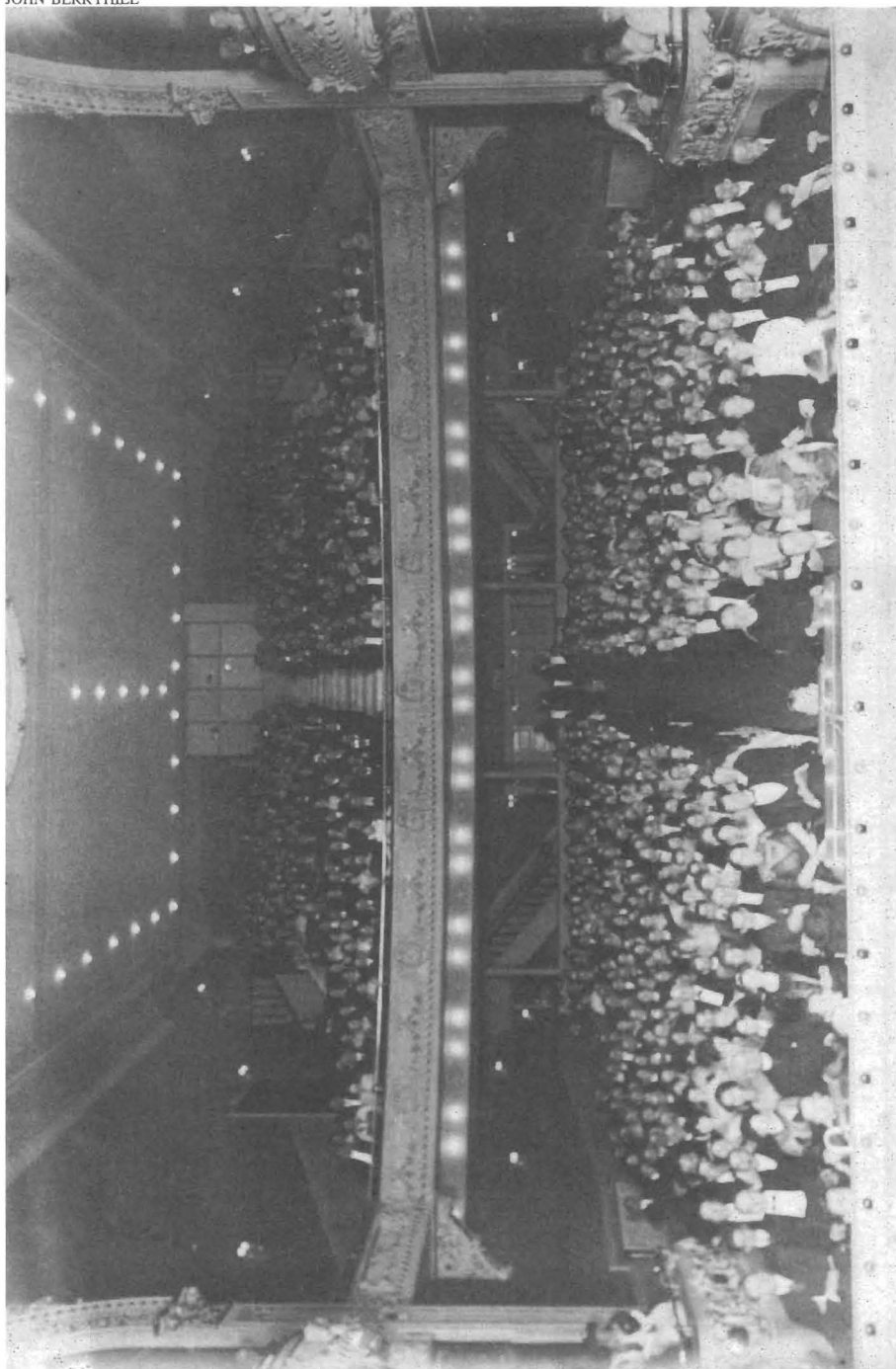
Seating

PARAMOUNT THEATRE



LOGE & BALCONY

LEVEL



Opening night at the Playhouse, 15 January 1914.